

The
Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

... edited by Barry Mishkind - the Eclectic

Dave Burns shares this comment on the current EAS landscape.

Federal regulators and broadcast management and engineers, who are talking right now about a new national alerting infrastructure, must incorporate rules which require all licensed broadcasters to serve their listeners and advertisers in real emergencies.

We must do better than happens in many places. Like this:

---quote ---

Sept, 2008.

It's a beautiful Saturday morning after the tail end of Hurricane Ike blew through the night before.

All electricity is out in my end of town. Comcast supplies our telephone, TV, and Internet. Out! No cell, either! ...For two whole days!!

One of the two real radio stations in town was off air due to no standby power and the other was all Nascar and other sports, most of that weekend. In other words, automated most of that weekend.

We here in the cornfield have no difficulties. Water, and food in cans and bags, and a thawing refrigerator.

But, Ike tore stuff up and large trees and limbs were everywhere. We have no idea where/if we could go in case of a personal situation. Fortunately, we have no emergencies.

We are equipped with 3 battery-operated radios in working condition. We tune around and we are entertained, but uninformed.

--- end quote ---

If the coming countdown clock leads to not more than new, mandated, and expensive equipment to achieve inadequate goals now in place, some of us will be dead meat.

If there is no new requirement to alert listeners to pending local disasters, this will become a

miscarriage of mission -- Not BS or wolf-crying, but real emergencies!!!

Will I not be able to depend on the most dependable link I have? If the steel is still vertical, radio could be the only thing left to inform of critical services and deadly warnings... the only thing we have between us and the possibility of our entering past tense.

This should include cable, cable access, et al.

No, 24 hour staff should not be mandated. But, If staff is on duty, or if they can be found in bed or mowing the lawn (and they can with a telephone tree list), why wouldn't state and feds and local broadcasters and EMAs want and demand that this warning system is up and flying in the face of local disaster?

I'd not want to be off the air or unavailable when my listeners and my advertisers need me most. Surely none wants to be party to disaster. (ala Minot)

Can you say public interest, convenience, necessity and safety? Can we get serious?

If the status stays quo, broadcast continues to become of less use all the time. This missing mandate will maim and kill people.

It's imperative that the new national alerting infrastructure incorporates rules which require all licensed broadcasters to serve their listeners and advertisers in their service areas with local information, too, in real emergencies.

3/23/10

This was written by Richard Rudman as a response to Dave Burns' comments.

Over sixty years of warning research has shown that a very likely place for warnings to fail is right at the origination point. A lot of warnings never go out.

This research resides at the Natural Hazards Center of the University of Colorado at Boulder. When the Partnership For Public Warning (PPW) was founded in 2001 we drew heavily on this repository for reports. Many of them were authored by someone I consider to be one of the foremost experts in the field, Dr. Denis Mileti, Professor Emeritus at the U of C, Boulder. Denis was also a key supporter and member of the PPW.

I would suggest that anyone interested in the priceless body of knowledge accumulated on warnings at the University of Colorado, Boulder and the work of Dr. Mileti check out these links:

<http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/research/qr/>

<http://urbanearth.gps.caltech.edu/about-2/dr-dennis-s-mileti/>

What I think is needed here is to make it crystal clear to local government that they have a legal duty to warn. There are many highly trained and dedicated people in the warning business, but not enough. Making their duty more clear as a legal point will help.

But, the legal argument is not enough. I think the best way to get where we need to go is to build effective local, state and national partnerships. This partnership idea was behind the PPW, and has been suggested by me and others (including the SBE) to the FCC as the Commission looks at national EAS testing. SBE in fact suggested in its Comments that the EAS National Advisory Committee (NAC) be revived. The NAC charter as a Federal Advisory Committee was allowed to expire in 2002 by the Commission.

As I have said many times in the past, where you see EAS working well, you will see broadcasters and local emergency management literally and figuratively meeting each other half way.

If you look at where EAS is working, you will already see such partnerships. Washington State is a great example. Probably the greatest value of such working partnerships is how they operate when things go wrong, as well as when they go right. What happens after EAS events, including tests, is a post event analysis. Some in emergency management call them "hot washes". They look at what unfolded, take lessons learned, and strive to incorporate those lessons for future improvement.

Those of you involved with viable EAS partnerships know exactly what I am talking about. You will also "get" another of my favorite lines -- "The day of the emergency is a bad day to go and meet your local emergency manager."

Richard Rudman
Vice Chair, CA SECC

Standard disclaimer: I am speaking as an individual. My thoughts do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBE.

This was written by Rod Zeigler as a response to Dave Burns' comments.

I won't hold my tongue on this one.

He has actually hit the nail on the head on a few things. Fully automated stations and satellators probably do not have anyone that can go on the air locally. Staffing has been cut back to the marrow in many places. These operations are left with sales people that would not have a clue if you put them in a studio.

So, yes, there are quite a few broadcasters that are unable to serve the Public Interest, Convenience, and Necessity. Many have been allowed to do this by waiver of Regulations.

Automatic retransmission of EAS messages has been considered the remedy to this situation. For pre-incident information this is feasible, for post incident information it is not.

I appreciate the NWS and the fine product that they broadcast, however, asking them to start giving shelter information on a neighborhood, by neighborhood basis, or chasing down representatives from various utilities for predictions of service restoration is well beyond their mission. It is the mission of the local broadcaster.

One thing I do take exception to is asking for more "Requirements." Sorry, that is the last thing we need. If a company decides that emergency information dissemination is not in their business plan, then so be it. This is no different than any other formatics decision they make. If they broadcast programming that you do not like, you will turn the dial to another station. If they are running NASCAR while Rome burns, and you are interested in the fire, you will turn the dial.

You will also remember that in the future and your listening habits will reflect this. More requirements to cover emergencies will only be met with cleverer ways to circumvent them by those so inclined. I would suggest he remember his problems, with the broadcasters mentioned in his letter, when their licenses come up for renewal and make his displeasure known to the FCC at that time.

It would be nice if all emergency agencies cooperated with each other at all times. We live in the real world where this is not going to be the case in every situation. All we can hope for is the best at a given time. "Forcing" agencies to work together is not unlike herding cats. They might head in the same direction some of the time, but only when it suits their individual interests.

All we, as broadcasters interested in serving the public interest, convenience, and necessity, can do

is help plan and implement the new system. It will be up to the public to find us when they need us.

Rod Zeigler

Feedback

Your comments on EAS, its current state, and what needs to be done.

When I was at Laredo, TX we seldom received an EAS test. Another engineer said that he never received them and thought that maybe their level was bad. LP1 and LP2 are in the same building, same owner. They told me that only 1 of their stations had EAS equipment.

EAS is a waste of paper. We receive weather warnings, but ignore them. Frequently they may not even be seen until several hours later. They are in English, and we are a Spanish station. Same problem with child abduction, plus there is no recording or written info.

Stan Swanson